

**Written Testimony for House Republican Policy Committee Hearing:
Workforce Development in Pennsylvania**

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Submitted by Will Bernstein

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Good morning. Thank you Representative Marshall, and members of the committee, for inviting me to address you today. My name is Will Bernstein, and I am a Policy Analyst with the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. As you may know, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and its affiliates – the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, the Pennsylvania Economy League of Southwestern Pennsylvania, and the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance – work in collaboration with public and private sector partners to stimulate economic growth and enhance the quality of life in southwestern Pennsylvania. The Conference is a private sector leadership organization with more than 300 Regional Investors. It is these Regional Investors, your constituents, who help to formulate and implement our agenda, and for the past three years workforce development has been a top priority of our organizations.

The Importance of Well Informed High School and Post Secondary Education and Training Choices

One of the great successes in southwestern Pennsylvania during the last several years has been the resilience of its regional economy in the face of a national recession. The unemployment rate in the Pittsburgh region has remained lower than the national average and as a result, the job aggregator website ImaginePittsburgh.com has averaged 20,000 available jobs over the past several years. That is the good news. The bad news is that this also highlights a great challenge facing Greater Pittsburgh: too many of those open positions require skills that local residents don't have. Right now there are 1,500 open manufacturing positions, 1,800 healthcare positions, and 4,000 IT jobs. These are good jobs with family sustaining wages, but they require education and skills the unemployed and underemployed don't have.

What can we do to address this issue?

Rethink traditional college messaging

At the national level, 66% of new jobs in next decade will require some college, but 19 of the 30 with the largest projected job growth are “middle skill,” not requiring a four-year degree. Every student will need to graduate from high school (and far too many still do not), but they will also need post secondary training or education. However, that does not mean that every child should be pushed to attend a four-year college.

We know that 81% of high school graduates enter college but only 42% complete a Bachelors degree. That means 58% of people who start college end with no degree, no formal credentials, and in most cases, lots of debt. A recent *New York Times* survey of three years of college graduates found that for those who had found gainful employment – and many had not – nearly half were in jobs that did not require a four-year college degree. We know that those with an associate degree will earn 30% more than those with just a high school diploma. This means that our community colleges can play a crucial role in helping us close the skills gap.

Too few middle and high school students – and far too few parents – are aware of any of this data. And that means that we need to do a much better job communicating economic reality to students while they are in the best possible position to make smart choices for their futures. Fewer than 25% of high school seniors in 2008 who took the ACT exam scored at “college ready” in all 4 subjects (English, math, reading, science), but we know that 81% of them started college.

Support for career education partnerships between schools and businesses

Programs like the Pittsburgh Regional Compact, an initiative of the Allegheny Conference which facilitates educator and business partnerships, provide ways to directly connect employers and working professionals with K-12 students, helping them learn about the realities of getting a job in the modern economy. Programs like this have proven particularly successful when schools have staff dedicated to career counseling and coordinated career education programming. But in a time of severe budget restraints, these kinds of programs are often the first to be eliminated. We’d like to see the Department of Education aggressively encourage its Intermediate Units to work with their Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and local businesses to create effective but relatively inexpensive career education programs. At the Conference, we are developing a

series of videos that interview business leaders about what high school students need to think about for their career futures. Every Intermediate Unit has excellent conferencing capacity that could make such programs available to all schools, even if they are underserved and not located in an economically prosperous district.

Employers are very concerned about the lack of “soft” skills that are so crucial to engaging in successful workplace behaviors. There are many excellent programs to help build a student’s self confidence and professional demeanor, and they too are easily accessed virtually.

Support and fund a robust system of Career and Technical Education in Pennsylvania

Manufacturing is a vital part of our economy, and many believe that America must return to making things in order to prosper in the long term. But manufacturing jobs are not viewed as favorably as many other occupations, even though they tend to have higher than average wages and are, in fact, high technology jobs. We are currently working with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit and the Three Rivers WIB to connect manufacturing employers with Career Technical Centers (CTCs) to develop technical training and to create effective pathways to a good paying job and opportunities for earning a two or four-year degree.

Many regional manufacturers cite the European apprenticeship models as highly effective for both students and businesses. We’d like to see implementation of SB 522, which would fund industry partnerships and give WIBs the flexibility to help address real employer needs by facilitating these kinds of educator/employer partnerships.

The institutions that provide the training for these kinds of skills are our CTCs and community colleges. Right now, the funding structure of CTCs, in which school districts often lose money by sending students to the CTC, creates a system in which schools have an incentive to steer students away from career and technical education. CTE isn’t the right choice for all students, but it is the right choice for many students, and it is important that that determination is made on the merits, and not because of a school district’s financial considerations.

Integrating curriculum and programs between CTCs and community colleges is a top priority in our view. One of the best ways to build strong technical skills in our students is to have continuity and coordination between their courses of study in high school and the training they

receive at post secondary institutions. Unfortunately, much of the federal funding that supported these types of activities has been reduced or eliminated in the recent budget negotiations.

We also strongly advocate that the state eliminate the administrative barriers to collaboration between high schools and post-secondary schools, including state mandates relating to teacher certification, among others. A recent study in North Carolina found that dual enrollment participants were more likely than their peers to pursue a bachelor's degree, and dual enrollment participation was positively related to students' first-semester grade point averages.

It is important that the state government consider secondary and post-secondary education as a coordinated system, not purely separate entities, and make sure that state regulations don't stand in the way of important educational innovations.

Active promotion of career and technical education

For too long, CTCs, and career and technical education in general, have been relegated to second class status in our education system. Many school districts are reluctant to recommend CTE to their best students, and often send only students with learning or behavioral challenges. Educators are pressured – often by parents and school boards – to demonstrate that close to 100% of their students pursue college. This is a huge disservice, especially as our high schools are not held accountable for post secondary outcomes.

Additionally, parents and public leaders have placed an enormous emphasis on the importance of attending a four year liberal arts college, and have left technical schools and community colleges as a lesser option. The truth is that a four year university experience is not the right choice for everyone. Post-secondary training is essential to succeeding in today's workplace, but the best type of training varies from person to person, and in many cases the students who graduate from technical programs with high-tech skills will find themselves with substantially better job prospects than the students who got a liberal arts degree because they thought they had to. Again, this is not to say that we should privilege one type of training over another – it is saying that we should be honest with our students about the choices and opportunities they have in front of them.

Thank you.